

GROWTH OF ACREAGE UNDER RAW COTTON IN INDIA 1851-1901—A QUANTITATIVE ACCOUNT*

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FOR a greater part of the nineteenth century, raw cotton was our most important cash crop that entered into long-distance trade in and beyond India. A considerable degree of geographical specialisation had already been achieved in respect of this crop during the pre-railways age.¹ Nevertheless it continued to be "cultivated in patches in almost every part" of India even around 1850.² Several significant developments thereafter intervened with this pattern. The acreage under cotton underwent not only further extension, but also region-wise redistribution. A temporary cotton scarcity in the world market caused by the American Civil War (1861-65) created an unprecedented price impetus for the Indian cultivators to put more of their land under cotton. Later, despite a crash in the prices, all-round developments in transport — the opening of the Suez Canal (1869) and the rapid extension of made roads, bullock-carts, steam-ships and, above all, the railways — helped sustain, more or less, the same level of exports and cotton acreage as had been achieved in the 1860s. They also led to an increasing commercialisation of agriculture and crop specialisation.

Attempts were made to collect the cotton acreage data alongside the introduction of improved or exotic cotton varieties in select areas of India quite early in the nineteenth century, in response to Manchester's growing interest in this matter. These were continued during the subsequent decades, in a more elaborate manner, and now

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India means India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but excludes Burma. For convenience, we have also excluded from our coverage Baluchistan (8.5 per cent of total area). Portuguese-French Possessions in India had practically no cotton cultivation.

¹ See for details A. Guha, "Raw cotton of western India: output, transportation and marketing, 1750-1850". *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, IX, 1, 1972, pp. 1-41. Also see *ibid.*, X, 1, 1973 for a follow-up.

² Quote from J. F. Royle, *On the Culture and Commerce of Cotton in India and Elsewhere With An Account of the Experiments Made by the Hon. East India Company up to the Present Time* (London, 1851), p. 18.